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Testimony Regarding HB 5520, Section 19

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HB5220

Sec. 19. (*Effective from passage*) (a) Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes, after holding a public hearing on the matter, the Commissioner of Environmental Protection shall enter into an agreement or agreements with the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc. or Riverhouse Properties, LLC to exchange lands or other consideration of approximately equal value. The land to be conveyed by the state is approximately 17.40 acres and is identified as Assessor's Lot 22-2 Bridge Road, Haddam, CT. Such land is further identified as Lot 1 and Lot 2 on a map prepared by William B. Bergan, dated February 11, 2003, with revisions dated March 12, 2009, and with such revisions titled "Division of Former Eagle Land Corp. Prop. - 2 Lots". Such land to be conveyed by the state shall not include any land with frontage along the Connecticut River. The land or other consideration to be conveyed by the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc. may include all or a portion of a 2.70 acre parcel of land on the west side of Lumber Yard Road in East Haddam, CT, and is further identified on the East Haddam's Tax Assessor's Map # M17 as Lots #L096 and #L090. Such land is also a portion of land acquired from the state of Connecticut on February 18, 1964, and recorded in the land records of the town of East Haddam in volume 79 at page 623. The land or other consideration to be conveyed by Riverhouse Properties, LLC may include all or a portion of an approximately 87.70 acre parcel of land on the east side of High Street in the Higganum section of Haddam, CT. Such land is further identified as Parcels #42-1, 43 and 44 on Haddam Assessor's Map 24 and Parcel 92 on Map 14, and is further identified as land conveyed from Walkley Heights Associates via a deed dated May 26, 2004, as recorded in Volume 278 at Page 287 of the Haddam land records. The specific description of land or other consideration to be conveyed among the Department of Environmental Protection, the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc. and Riverhouse Properties, LLC shall be established by mutual agreement of such parties, and such parties shall make all reasonable efforts to reach such agreement on or

before December 31, 2011. Said exchange shall be subject to the approval of the State Properties Review Board.

(b) The State Properties Review Board shall complete its review of the conveyance of said parcels of land not later than thirty days after it receives a proposed agreement from the Department of Environmental Protection. The state land shall remain under the care and control of said department until a conveyance is made in accordance with the provisions of this section. The State Treasurer shall execute and deliver any deed or instrument necessary for a conveyance under this section.

HB 5520 again proposes the land swap between the State DEP and Steve Rocco and his business associates. There is much passion in Haddam about the situation.

I am not necessarily opposed to the swap but, as written, the language in Section 19 of the bill is vague. The language states "all or a portion" of the High Street parcel is to be conveyed to the State. The entire 87.70 acres, not one parcel but several parcels, adjacent to High Street in Higganum should be added in its entirety to Cockaponsett State Forest as part of the swap and the acreage and parcel descriptions must be specifically stated in the language of the bill. The Haddam Land Trust recently acquired an abutting 15 acres (Cedar Hill Preserve) as noted on the following map. (Figure 1.) The properties in question are noted by their Haddam Tax Assessor Map and Lot Numbers. The location of Cockaponsett Forest is noted.



Figure 1.

The Haddam Land Trust feels strongly that this unique opportunity to form a conservation corridor with the nearby State Forest should be realized. Trails can lead from Higganum Center through to Cockaponsett Forest. The land will be available for wildlife habitat, hunting, and groundwater recharge, which supports the goals of the Haddam Plan of Conservation and Development. Haddam has enough residential dwellings and does not need (relatively) pristine land to become homes that specifically benefit the developer and not necessarily the greater good of the citizens of Haddam.

In addition, the Tylerville parcel and surrounding parcels have groundwater polluted with hydrocarbons. Stipulation that the groundwater be cleansed of these hydrocarbons should be a consideration and specifically stated in any transfer agreement. (For more detail on the groundwater situation, please contact Citizens for Clean Groundwater.)

